

Confirmation in the Church of Scotland.

THIS is not the first time that an article on Confirmation has appeared in *The Church Service Society Annual*. Its second issue (May, 1930) contained one by the Rev. D. Bruce Nicol, M.C., B.D., a few months before his sudden death. Readers are referred to this for a fuller treatment than is possible within the limits assigned me.

The doctrine of *Episcopal* Confirmation rests chiefly on Acts viii., 17—one of the only two occasions recorded in Scripture when the apostles performed this action. To quote the late Dr Wotherspoon: "There is no evidence that it was done by them generally, or for all who were baptised by others. Apostles were few: baptisms were many, and in many places: the physical difficulties in the way of the supposition are obvious. Some such practice, indeed, may well have existed in the general ministry. But, if so, there is nothing to prove that the rite was reserved for the apostles".

Indeed, it seems incongruous that any ordained minister may celebrate Baptism or the Lord's Supper, but that the interposition of another should be demanded for the rite which is a connecting link between them.

Tertullian⁽¹⁾ describes the sacramental act of Baptism as consisting of three distinct elements—the Baptism proper; anointing with chrism; the laying on of hands "thereafter". This seems to approximate to Orthodox (Eastern) practice, where the priest himself confirms immediately after Baptism, but uses chrism blessed on Maundy Thursday by the Œcumenical Patriarch. There is, however, no laying on of hands. Romans regard this as valid Confirmation, though they themselves normally restrict Confirmation to the Bishop. Only the Anglicans appear to make this restriction an invariable rule. Incidentally, the laying on of hands, in the Roman Communion, was revived, after long disuse, comparatively recently. The older use was Benediction, as with ourselves.

(¹) *De Baptismo*, cc. 6-8.

Episcopal Confirmation was one means of exalting the office of the monarchical episcopate. Both Jerome and Augustine opposed its growing tendency; but by the Synods of Lyons (1274) and Florence (1439) it was established as the second sacrament of the Western Church. It has various names: *Confirmatio*, *Sigillum*, *Consignatio*, *Chrisma*, *Unctio*, *Impositio Manuum*. The catechumen must be at least seven years old, has generally a sponsor, and sometimes receives a confirmation-name. Spiritual preparation is recommended, but not demanded.

The Reformers rejected Confirmation as a sacrament, partly because it was not instituted by Christ, partly because it seemed to detract from Baptism. Calvin is very insistent on the latter point. Where Confirmation was continued, as with the Lutherans, it had no sacramental character, but was rather a judicial act of admission to Communion, of the Church's own authority. A public confession of faith was demanded in the Calvinistic or Reformed Churches.

Knox's Book of Common Order and the Westminster Directory contain no forms of service for such an occasion; but the *First Book of Discipline* declares that "none are to be admitted to the Mystery" (Sacrament of the Lord's Supper) "who can not formally say the Lord's Prayer, the Articles of Belief" (Apostles' Creed) "and declare the Sum of the Law". One of the Five Articles of Perth required that children of eight should be brought to the Bishop, who was "to bless them, with prayer for the increase of their knowledge and the continuance of God's holy Grace with them". Laud's Liturgy contains an Order of Confirmation almost identical with that in the English Prayer Book. Dr William McMillan⁽¹⁾, however, considers it "very questionable whether Confirmation by the laying on of the hands of a Bishop was ever practised in Scotland in those days".

After the Revolution Settlement, the General Assembly enacted, in 1706, that "At the first admission of any to the Lord's Supper, ministers should put the persons to be admitted in mind of their parents' engagement for them in Baptism, and bid them explicitly and personally to renew their baptismal covenant to be the Lord's, and to live unto Him and serve Him all the days of their life".

Even after the Reformation the age of admission was low—perhaps on the analogy of our Lord's Presentation

(1) "Worship of the Scottish Reformed Church", pp. 229-232.

in the Temple at twelve years. That was the age at which James Melville first communicated. In Edinburgh, in 1575, "ane bairn of X years" was admitted. No doubt children came to manhood and womanhood earlier then than now. But to-day we tend to go to the opposite extreme. If I may quote from a previous article of mine on this subject⁽¹⁾: "There is a feeling in many quarters to-day that First Communion should be made the goal and completion of the Sunday School curriculum—many a boy or girl is a better Christian then than ten years later, when regular instruction in religious doctrine has ceased, and 'the world is too much with us'. Even those denominations which insist on strict and precise evidence of conversion in all candidates are beginning to realise, on psychological as well as theological grounds, that the age of religious experience and Christian conviction may often be pushed fairly far back. At fifteen or sixteen that tide in the soul-life is often at its fullest."

In the second edition of *Euchologion*, published by this Society in 1869, there is given a *Form and Order for the Admission of Catechumens*. In later editions this becomes *The Order for the Admission of Catechumens to the Confirmation of the Baptismal Vow and to the Participation of the Lord's Supper*. So the word "Confirmation" creeps cooly in: but it is not yet official. For that we must wait till 1923, the year of the first appearance of *Prayers for Divine Service: By Authority of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland*. The title of the office is here stated as *Form and Order for the Confirmation of Baptismal Vows and Admission to the Lord's Supper*.

Why, then, is not the word itself more widely used? I have employed it publicly since the beginning of my ministry—even before 1923—and none has ever taken the slightest exception. If the Church of Scotland is to make a stand against high Anglican claims, it must insist that it has Confirmation—one just as valid as any ministered by episcopal hands. It may be added that the title of "Confirmation" is also found in the Service Books of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (where a permissive rubric is added that the Minister may "lay his hands, if such be his discretion, upon the head of every one in order kneeling before him"), and of the United Church of Canada, where the same practice is recommended.

(1) In "The Review of the Churches", January, 1926: "The Preparation and Admission of Catechumens in the Church of Scotland".

Does this mean that we are to believe, not only that the catechumens confirm their baptismal vows, but that these vows are confirmed in them by the Holy Spirit? I have already ventured to commit myself in print to this view.⁽¹⁾ Otherwise the prayer for the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit, so often used during the ceremony, would seem to be meaningless. But that raises large issues with which it is hardly the province of this article to deal.

So let me conclude with a few practical points. From the experience of the past fifteen years I have formed the conclusion that Confirmation should *not* take place at a week-night Preparatory Service, with its usually scant congregation, but on the Sunday morning preceding Communion Sunday. The names are submitted to a meeting of Kirk Session half an hour before the service; the meeting should then be adjourned, and closed with the Benediction in church. It need not be added that every candidate must have been previously baptised. I say nothing here about the preliminary instruction itself—that would require a separate article—except to observe that six weekly meetings must surely be regarded as a *minimum*.

The actual service follows a more or less universal order: The Preface: the Questions and their answers⁽²⁾; The Admission (with hands uplifted in Benediction—imposition in a very few churches); (The Singing of the Aaronic Benediction); Prayer (which may well include, in addition to the Invocation of the Holy Ghost, the beautiful Anglican collect beginning "Defend, O Lord, these Thy children . . ."); Brief Address (in which the whole congregation is reminded of its own responsibilities); Right Hand of Fellowship by the Minister (and, though not invariably, the Elders), and presentation of Communion Cards and Certificates of Confirmation; Praise; Benediction.

(1) See the writer's "Preparing for the Lord's Table: A Manual for Catechumens" p. 30.

(2) Those approved by the General Assembly of 1935 are as follows:—

1. Do you receive the doctrine of the Christian faith, whereof we make confession, saying, "I believe," etc.? (The Apostles' Creed).

Or, alternatively:

Do you confess your faith in God as your Heavenly Father, in Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord, and in the Holy Spirit as your Sanctifier?

2. Do you promise, in dependence on Divine grace, to serve the Lord and to walk in his ways all the days of your life?

3. Do you promise to make diligent use of the means of grace, to share dutifully in the worship and service of the Church, and to give of your substance, as the Lord may prosper you, for the advancement of His Kingdom throughout the World?

It should be added that the exact form of the service, whatever it may be, should be explained most carefully to one's Catechumens' Class at its closing meeting, so that there may be no awkwardness on the part of its members. We must remember that this should be one of the most solemn acts of the Christian life, and prepare for it accordingly.

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